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A Hard Official Look At C.I.A. Operation

President Kennedy's selection of a four-man group to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency's part in the Cuban crisis and look into various other aspects of our nation's top secret defense activities should forestall any resumption of efforts inside Congress at this time to have a joint House-Senate C.I.A. watchdog committee set up.

Such a proposal has already been beaten back in the current session of Congress since it was felt such action would not serve the interests of national security. The House and Senate have C.I.A. subcommittees that receive briefings but actually no rank and file congressmen know very much on the subject; and since such a large and diversified body as the House of Representatives is bound to include at least one or two blabbermouths, who can say but that they generally uninformed status is for the best. The possibilities of disastrous leaks coming from even a nine-man joint committee such as has been proposed are not great but must not be dismissed lightly. Particularly since such a body's personnel and staff would of necessity change from time to time.

We've heard some very vague and general estimates, as to the amount of the C.I.A. budget, and the number on its payroll. For example, in Harper's Magazine three years ago it was estimated that the Agency then spent between \$100 million and \$1 billion annually, and its manpower total was anywhere between 3,000 and 30,000. The New York Times this week quoted Harry Howe Ransom, a research associate in the Defense Program at Harvard University as estimating C. I. A.'s Washington staff strength at 8,000 to 10,000 with several thousand other agents

outside Washington and overseas. Earlier, New York Times writer Jack Raymond noted that the C.I.A. precise budget is secret and so is the size of its staff size, but added, "It is understood it spends \$7 billion a year and has a staff of 12,000 to 18,000." As for the Cuban venture, Time Magazine has estimated it has cost "from \$155,000 monthly to as high as \$500,000 on occasions."

That the C.I.A. did not cover itself with glory in the invasion fiasco has been generally accepted as a fact; it has also been charged with blundering in Laos and in the U-2 incident, with miscalculation on the Chinese intervention in Korea, and with being caught flat-footed by Nasser's seizure of the Suez Canal.

While the Agency obviously needs a curtain of secrecy if it is to function at all, that curtain also keeps it from answering such charges and the public from sifting these criticisms, from making any accurate assessment as to how much of the responsibility the C.I.A. bears for past embarrassments of the United States on the world stage. The inquiry group named by President Kennedy should be able to find the answers but we can hardly expect this assessment to be made public in its entirety. This is a case in which the national security overrides the people's right to know to an extent; but it is important that it not be permitted to ride rough-shod.

The investigation has been placed in good hands; we may expect it to do its work well. The President should be able to report thereafter to the American public that the necessary corrective measures have been taken inside our intelligence set-up. Meanwhile the C.I.A. itself and other agencies involved in the Cuban matter have the obligation of searching analysis their procedures and organization.